

IN BRIEF

Parking amendment in Seaside eliminates 'one-size-fits-all' requirement

SEASIDE — The city saw an end to “one-size-fits-all” parking requirements for owners of apartment buildings. The goal is to remove roadblocks to affordable and workforce housing.

“The ordinance we have now requires two off-street parking spaces per dwelling unit,” Planning Director Kevin Cupples said.

This has a significant impact on the amount of backup land necessary to develop smaller apartments or multi-family dwellings, which in turn drives up the land cost to develop smaller rental housing.

According to the new ordinance, studios will need one off-street space; a one-bedroom apartment 1.25 spaces and a two-bedroom apartment 1.5 spaces. Larger units would continue to require a minimum of two off-street spaces.

The idea came from former planning commissioner Bill Carpenter, who was honored by the City Council on Monday for his service to the community. Based on a request by the Planning Commission, the City Council initiated the public hearing for the zoning change in 2019.

“I first saw this amendment on my term on the Planning Commission,” City Councilor Steve Wright said. “This was Bill’s idea. It shows the perseverance of one individual to keep pushing at it and pushing at it, and we thank you.”

Coast Guard conducts waterways analysis of Columbia River entrance

The U.S. Coast Guard is conducting a waterways analysis and management system study of the Columbia River entrance and is seeking public comment.

The Coast Guard will use the study to validate the adequacy of the existing aids to navigation system and to get a better understanding of general safety issues and the uses of each waterway.

To participate in a user survey, visit the Coast Guard’s District 13 website. The deadline to provide public comment is June 30.

— *The Astorian*

Virus deadly to rabbits found in multiple areas of Oregon

PORTLAND — Environmental experts are concerned about Oregon’s wild rabbit population after multiple cases of a virus that is deadly to the animals were confirmed in different parts of the state.

The latest case of the rabbit hemorrhagic disease, which was confirmed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Wednesday, was in La Pine. Last month, the disease was detected nearly 200 miles away in Milwaukie in eight dead domestic and feral rabbits.

Following last month’s discovery, Dr. Ryan Scholz, Oregon’s state veterinarian, said the virus has taken hold in the feral rabbit population.

The disease, also referred to as RHD, causes sudden death and is highly contagious among the animals, spreading through contact with infected rabbits, meat, fur or other materials. Birds, rodents, flies, predators and scavengers can also spread this virus, as well as people by carrying it on their clothing, hands and shoes.

The disease poses no health risk to humans, experts say.

Statue of Frank a step closer to U.S. Capitol

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Wednesday signed a measure that starts the process of honoring the late Billy Frank Jr. — a Nisqually tribal member who championed treaty rights and protecting the environment — with a statue at the U.S. Capitol.

Inslee signed the measure at Wa He Lut Indian School in the Nisqually community north of Olympia, joined by Nisqually tribal leaders.

The measure, which was overwhelmingly approved by the Legislature with bipartisan support, starts the legal process to replace Washington’s Marcus Whitman statue in the National Statuary Hall Collection with a statue of Frank, who died in 2014 at age 83.

“Billy Frank Jr. was known as a warrior for justice,” Inslee said before signing the bill. “In addition to being a warrior for justice, he was a warrior for the natural world and the values we hold so dear in the state of Washington.”

Frank was first arrested for salmon fishing as a boy in 1945 — an event that led him on a long campaign for tribal rights. He and others were repeatedly arrested as they staged “fish ins” demanding the right to fish in their historical waters, as they were guaranteed in treaties when they ceded land to white settlers in the 19th century. Frank was jailed more than 50 times.

The efforts were vindicated in 1974, when U.S. District Judge George Boldt affirmed the tribes’ right to honor the old treaties.

Over the next 40 years, Frank continued to advocate for tribal fishing rights and the protection of natural resources, including salmon.

— *Associated Press*

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Astoria Development Commission, 5 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Seaside Transportation Advisory Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

the Astorian

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Cascadia Wildlands

Critics say the state is removing trees that aren't actually hazardous.

Arborists say state's post-fires tree cutting is excessive

By CASSANDRA PROFITA

Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon has a lot of cleanup work to do after more than 1 million acres of land burned in last year’s wildfires.

That cleanup involves removing burned trees near roads and structures that could fall and create safety hazards. But which burned trees are truly hazardous and need to be removed?

More than 20 conservation groups sent a letter Tuesday to U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack opposing the post-fire roadside logging proposed or actively being carried out by federal agencies.

And a growing number of people are sounding alarms over excessive tree-cutting along scenic highways and protected rivers as the Oregon Department of Transportation and its contractors proceed with plans to cut nearly 300,000 trees deemed as hazardous.

The critics include arborists who have worked on the project and say the reckless tree-cutting operations across the state are being mismanaged and need to be stopped.

Images of roadside clearcuts have sparked concern that contractors are rushing and cutting more trees than they need to because they want to cash in on Federal Emergency Management Agency funds that are expected to cover 75% of the hazard tree removal work.

Meanwhile, road closures surrounding the work make it difficult for the public to see which trees are being marked for removal.

But ODOT spokesman Tony Andersen said the state designed its hazard tree removal contracts to protect against cutting trees unnecessarily just to make more money.

working to identify, evaluate, mark and then remove those trees so that no more lives are lost at the hands of 2020 wildfires.”

While the state is moving carefully to remove trees, Andersen said, “there’s bound to be some urgency there because the faster you remove them, the less time there is for them to hurt anyone.”

According to Andersen, the state is using professional certified arborists and professional certified foresters to evaluate the burned trees using a long list of criteria to decide which ones should be marked for removal.

“No one in our task force wants to cut any more trees than we need to,” he said. “All this work is dictated and outlined by a specific set of criteria that provide the guidance for which trees are determined hazard trees and which trees will be removed.”

But arborists involved in developing and applying that criteria said it’s inadequate and it’s being used to remove trees that aren’t actually hazardous.

Arborists flag problems

Tom Ford worked as the head arborist for CDR McGuire, a company based in Florida that ODOT hired on a \$75.5 million contract to oversee the state’s wildfire debris removal project.

The company was contracted to provide guidance on which hazard trees to cut in nine different parts of the state that were impacted by wildfire. Initial estimates projected a need to remove more than 295,000 hazard trees.

Ford said his role with the company was required by FEMA to ensure environmental stewardship in the hazard tree removal work that the federal agency has already funded with \$140 million.

very few people are qualified to do.

“It’s the most important role in the whole project — that’s how I interpreted it and that’s how I approached it,” Ford said.

He submitted what he thought was just the first draft of operating procedures for choosing which hazard trees to cut. But he says that draft wasn’t reviewed by other experts, and he received no feedback from his managers before it was implemented to guide the marking of hazard trees.

“They’re so far into something that’s so wrong,” he said. “The best thing that we can do is just stop it and start over.”

Ford said ODOT doesn’t need to be cutting so many trees so quickly because many fire-damaged trees will take years to become hazardous.

“As foresters, what do we do to bring this forest back to a state of health? We don’t cut down every single tree as fast as we can just because it’s partially burned,” he said. “But that’s what they’re doing.”

THE CRITICS INCLUDE ARBORISTS WHO HAVE WORKED ON THE PROJECT AND SAY THE RECKLESS TREE-CUTTING OPERATIONS ACROSS THE STATE ARE BEING MISMANAGED AND NEED TO BE STOPPED.

“What I proposed to ODOT was really simple because I wanted to just give people something they could get to the table with and start to argue and hammer out a real set of assessment guidelines,” Ford said. “It was never, ever, ever meant to be used in the field.”

Ford said the whole process was rushed, leaving arborists in the field without proper guidelines for marking which trees should be cut and which ones should be left standing to avoid unnecessary environmental damage.

“There was incredible pressure on me by people who didn’t understand what had to be done in order to do marking with due diligence,” he said. “It was almost like they didn’t think there were consequences to doing it wrong.”

The project has already marked about 64,000 trees and removed about 24,000 of them statewide, according to ODOT. But Ford said the criteria arborists are using to mark trees for removal is inappropriate and inadequate.

“They’re nowhere near resolving which trees should be cut,” he said. “We have no real supportable criteria for how we’re marking trees and we never have from the beginning.”

ODOT declined to comment on Ford’s employment with CDR Maguire, and the company has not responded to a request for comment.

But Andersen said there were multiple agencies involved in determining the criteria that are being used to mark trees for removal, including the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Ford said he was notified in January that he was no longer working on the project. He said he doesn’t know why he was let go, but it’s clear to him that the whole project is moving way too fast and needed more time to develop the proper guidelines for removing trees and train tree assessors.

‘A mismanaged operation’

Matt Allen, another arborist who worked on ODOT’s hazard tree removal project in the field, said he saw the consequences of not having solid criteria for which trees should be cut.

Allen is a certified master arborist who is tree risk assessment qualified, an additional certification known as TRAQ. He was hired in December to work for Mason Bruce & Girard, a Portland-based environmental consulting company working with CDR Maguire to identify hazard trees.

According to ODOT, the consulting company’s role is to help check the work of CDR Maguire employees and ensure hazard trees are marked correctly for removal.

Allen was directed to assess hazard trees along Oregon Route 138 on the North Umpqua River in southwest Oregon, where the Archie Creek fire burned more than 131,000 acres.

He said the people working alongside him for CDR Maguire were not certified arborists.

“They were a bunch of inexperienced people from the Southeast U.S. that had no idea what they were doing out there,” he said.

Allen said he helped train these employees in tree species identification so they could enter data into a phone app that applied an algorithm to determine which trees should be marked for removal.

The guidelines for choosing which trees were hazardous were constantly changing, he said, and the disorganized operation resulted in marking a lot of trees for removal that he didn’t consider to be hazardous.

“Most of these trees are burned, scorched and eventually will die, but very few if any are actually hazardous at this time,” he said. “I can count on one hand how many actually hazardous trees I found after tagging close to 5,500 trees for removal.”

‘I JUST DROVE THROUGH THE ARCHIE CREEK FIRE AREA, AND THE FEELING OF DRIVING THROUGH A CORRIDOR WITH DEAD AND DYING TREES ON BOTH SIDES OF YOU IS AN UNEASY FEELING. WE’RE WORKING TO IDENTIFY, EVALUATE, MARK AND THEN REMOVE THOSE TREES SO THAT NO MORE LIVES ARE LOST AT THE HANDS OF 2020 WILDFIRES.’

Tony Andersen | ODOT spokesman

He said safety is a top concern after last year’s wildfires left hundreds of thousands of dead and dying trees that could fall and hurt or even kill people driving along state roads.

“I just drove through the Archie Creek fire area, and the feeling of driving through a corridor with dead and dying trees on both sides of you is an uneasy feeling,” Andersen said. “We’re

Part of his assignment was the hefty task of writing a set of procedures for arborists to follow as they decided which burned trees near roads and structures should be removed.

As a certified arborist and hazard tree assessor with 30 years of experience falling hazard trees, Ford knew he was playing a critical role in a huge, complicated tree-removal job that